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AUTHOR Jernigan, Kenneth
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ABSTRACT

Three papers by the president of the National Federation of the Blind are presented. The first, "A Definition of Blindness," examines definitions of blindness, asserting the advantages of a functional or sociological definition over a physical or medical definition. He cites harm in legal distinctions between partial and full blindness and between those born blind and those who become blind as adults. The second paper, "Blindness: The Circle of Sophistry," addresses myths about blindness and suggests that the myths are upheld because they permit sighted people with feelings of inferiority to feel important. Noting that agencies established to help the blind frequently perpetuate the myths, he offers the approach of the National Federation of the Blind as an alternative. The final paper, "Competing on Terms of Equality," addresses issues of expectation from employers and employees. He cites his own experiences in selling insurance, teaching school, and working in an orientation center for blind persons. (CL)

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A DEFINITION OF BLINDNESS

by Kenneth Jernigan

Before we can talk intelligently about the problems of blindness or the potentialities of blind people, we must have a workable definition of blindness. Most of us are likely familiar with the generally accepted legal definition: visual acuity of not greater than 20/200 in the better eye with correction or a field not subtending an angle greater than 20 degrees. But this is not really a satisfactory definition. It is, rather, a way of recognizing in medical and measurable terms something which must be defined not medically or physically but functionally.

Putting to one side for a moment the medical terminology, what is blindness? Once I asked a group of high school students this question, and one of them replied—apparently believing that he was making a rather obvious statement—that a person is blind if he "can't see." When the laughter subsided, I asked the student if he really meant what he said. He replied that he did. I then asked him whether he would consider a person blind who could see light but who could not see objects—a person who would bump into things unless he used a cane, a dog, or some other travel aid and who would, if he depended solely on the use of his eyesight, walk directly into a telephone pole or fire plug. After some little hesitation the student said that he would consider such a person to be blind. I agreed with him and then went on to point out the obvious—that he literally did not mean that the definition of blindness was to be unable to see.

I next told this student of a man I had known who had "normal" (20/20) visual acuity in both eyes but who had such an extreme case of sensitivity to light that he literally could not keep his eyes open at all. The slightest amount of light caused such excruciating pain that the only way he could open his eyes was by prying them open with his fingers. Nevertheless, this person, despite the excruciating pain he felt while doing it, could read the eye chart without difficulty. The readings showed that he had "normal sight." This individual applied to the local Welfare Department for Public Assistance to the Blind and was duly examined by their ophthalmologist. The question I put to the student was this: "If you had been the ophthalmologist, would you have granted the aid or not?"

His answer was, "Yes."

"Remember," I told him, "under the law you are forbidden to give aid to any person who is not actually blind. Would you still have granted the assistance?" The student said that he would. Again, I agreed with him, but I pointed out that, far from his first facetious statement, what he was saying was this: It is possible for one to have "perfect sight" and still in the physical, literal sense of the word be blind.

I then put a final question to the student. I asked him whether if a sighted person were put into a vault

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which was absolutely dark so that he could see nothing whatever, it would be accurate to refer to that sighted person as a blind man. After some hesitation and equivocation the student said, "No." For a third time I agreed with him. Then I asked him to examine what we had established:

1. To be blind does not mean that one cannot see. (Here again I must interrupt to say that I am not speaking in spiritual or figurative terms but in the most literal sense of the word.)

2. It is possible for an individual to have "perfect sight" and yet be physically and literally blind.

3. It is possible for an individual not to be able to see at all and still be a sighted person.

What, then, in light of these seeming contradictions is the definition of blindness? In my way of thinking it is this: One is blind to the extent that he must devise alternative techniques to do efficiently those things which he would do with sight if he had normal vision. An individual may properly be said to be "blind" or a "blind person" when he has to devise so many alternative techniques—that is, if he is to function efficiently—that his pattern of daily living is substantially altered. It will be observed that I say <u>alternative</u> not <u>substitute</u> techniques, for the word <u>substitute</u> connotes inferiority, and the alternative techniques employed by the blind person need not be inferior to visual techniques. In fact, some of them are superior. The usually accepted legal definition of blindness already given (that is, visual acuity of less than 20/200 with correction or a field of less than 20 degrees) is simply one medical way of measuring and recognizing that anyone with better vision than the amount mentioned in the definition will (although he may have to devise some alternative techniques) likely not have to devise so many such techniques as to alter substantially his patterns of daily living. On the other hand, anyone with less vision than that mentioned in the legal definition will usually (I emphasize the word <u>usually</u>, for such is not always the case) need to devise so many such alternative techniques as to alter quite substantially his patterns of daily living.

It may be of some interest to apply this standard to the three cases already discussed:

First, what of the person who has light perception but sees little or nothing else? In at least one situation he can function as a sighted person. If, before going to bed, he wishes to know whether the lights are out in his home, he can simply walk through the house and "see." If he did not have light perception, he would have to use some alternative technique—touch the bulb, tell by the position of the switch, have some sighted person give him the information, or devise some other method. However, this person is still quite properly referred to as a blind person. This one visual technique which he uses is such a small part of his overall pattern of daily living as to be negligible in the total picture. The patterns of his daily living are substantially altered. In the main he employs alternative techniques to do those things which he would do with sight if he had normal vision—that is, he does if he functions efficiently.

Next, let us consider the person who

has normal visual acuity but cannot hold his eyes open because of his sensitivity to light. He must devise alternative techniques to do anything which he would do with sight if he had normal vision. He is quite properly considered to be a "blind person."

Finally, what of the sighted person who is put into a vault which has no light? Even though he can see nothing at all, he is still quite properly considered to be a "sighted person." He uses the same techniques that any other sighted person would use in a similar situation. There are no visual techniques which can be used in such circumstances. In fact, if a blind person found himself in such a situation, he might very well have a variety of techniques to use.

I repeat that, in my opinion, blindness can best be defined not physically or medically but functionally or sociologically. The alternative techniques which must be learned are the same for those born blind as for those who become blind as adults. They are quite similar (or should be) for those who are totally blind or nearly so and those who are "partially sighted" and yet are blind in the terms of the usually accepted legal definition. In other words, I believe that the complex distinctions which are often made between those who have partial sight and those who are totally blind, between those who have been blind from childhood and those who have become blind as adults are largely meaningless. In fact, they are often harmful since they place the wrong emphasis on blindness and its problems. Perhaps the greatest danger in the field of work for the blind today is the tendency to be hypnotized by jargon.

BLINDNESS: THE CIRCLE OF SOPHISTRY

An Address Delivered By

KENNETH JERNIGAN

President, National Federation of the Blind
At the Banquet of the Annual Convention

Phoenix, Arizona, July 6, 1984

Sophistry, we are told, is an argument or proposition which is clever and plausible but false and misleading. To illustrate let us consider color. We learn from the dictionary that color is: "The property of reflecting light of a particular wavelength." In other words if an object is green, the color (or wavelength) green is reflected back, and all other colors (or wavelengths) are absorbed. White, as everyone knows, is the absence of color, and black is the opposite. Yet, what we call black reflects no light waves at all and is, thus, the absence of color—while what we call white (again to quote the dictionary) is: "The reflection of all the rays that produce color." Therefore, the logic is inevitable: black is white, and white is black.

I wish I could say that the linguistic sleight-of-hand which I have just performed is symbolic of nothing more vicious than verbal gymnastics or a pleasant game, but that is not the way of it. Sophistry is no toy. It is one of the most deadly weapons in the arsenal of tyranny. It has bedeviled and bedazzled humanity since the beginning of history. If (as the saying goes) hypocrisy is the tribute which vice pays to virtue, then sophistry is the tribute which lies pay to the truth.

Sophistry takes its name from the sophists of ancient Athens. It was the principal instrument which they used first to discredit, then to imprison, and finally to execute Socrates. It was big in the middle ages with the Inquisition and the burning of witches. It flourishes today in the twentieth century. All we need do to understand the power of clever and plausible but false and misleading words is to remember the twisted rhetoric of Joseph Goebels and Adolph Hitler. Except for the glitter and hypnotic lure of sophistry the Nazi tanks might never have rolled, and the death and destruction of the Second World War might never have been.

And what sophistry has done to society as a whole it has done to the component parts—especially and particularly to disadvantaged minorities. And of all the minorities, none has experienced more cruelly and bitterly the blight of sophistry than those of us who are blind. It has been our greatest

stumbling block, our heaviest burden. It remains so today.

The clever and plausible but false and misleading arguments (the propositions which put us down and keep us out) are temptingly easy to accept and believe. With respect to the blind the message is clear and uncomplicated: the blind lack eyesight. Other people have it. Sight is important. Therefore, the blind are inferior. We are unable to compete. We must be taken care of. We cannot hold jobs—not, that is, unless the work is very simple, very repetitive, and very subsidized. We cannot raise children, travel independently, or manage our own lives. When one of us makes an achievement of obvious excellence, we are told that it means we have special genius, special talents, or unusual powers. Our other senses have grown keener to compensate. We are marvels, freaks, conversation pieces, and objects of pity—and often all at the same time and by the same person. According to this line of thought, whatever you call it and however you cut it, we are not (and can never hope to be) everyday, normal people—laughing, crying, working, playing, succeeding, failing, hoping, and dreaming like those around us. We are blind. That is sufficient. It is a matter of simple logic and common sense.

This is the traditional norm, the time-honored belief; and if it is true, we should face it, not fight or deny it. And we should face it not angrily or bitterly but with acceptance and humility, with gratitude for the charity we receive and the sufferance we are given. Moreover, if (as we are repeatedly told) this is really how it is, we should disband the National Federation of the Blind and confront our troubles alone—drawing whatever comfort we can from doctor, social worker, or priest; for there will be little purpose in collective action. If our problems are inherent in our blindness (if they are truly innate and not externally imposed), then our whole organizational existence has been not only a tragic mistake but a cruel detriment, for we have kindled hopes which can never be realized and conjured dreams which can never come true.

But, of course, this is not the way it is; and no sophistry on earth can make it that way. The arguments and propositions which hold that we are inferior are clever and plausible, but they are false and misleading. To put it bluntly, they are just plain lies. The fact is that the average blind person can compete on terms of equality with the average sighted person—in whatever line of endeavor you care to mention: work, play, criminal conduct, saintliness, immorality, rectitude, ill-temper, gentle behavior, laziness, or creativity. Then, why (one reasonably may ask) do seventy percent of the blind of employable years not have jobs? And even when we do get jobs, why are so many of us relegated to the sheltered shops and paid less than the minimum wage? Why (if what I am saying is the truth) are we told where we can sit on airplanes, denied insurance on equal terms with others, custodialized in the home by our families, condescended to on the streets by strangers, and treated in general as if we were children or freaks?

The answer is easy to give but hard (at least at the emotional level) for the average person to accept. In primitive societies light (whether firelight or daylight) meant safety and survival.

Darkness meant danger and fear. Light and the ability to see were equated, and they were thought of as good and pure. Blindness was considered synonymous with darkness, and darkness meant evil and inferiority.

The blind were not good at hunting or dodging a spear, so they were regarded as a drag on the tribe, a burden and a hindrance. They were treated and thought of as second-class, and they doubtless accepted the public view of their limitations, with a great many feelings of guilt and shame thrown in for good measure.

We no longer live in the hunting culture of primitive times, but we often act as if we do. The myths and prejudices of those times still dominate our feelings and control our subconscious. In today's society there is very little premium on killing a saber-tooth tiger or dodging a spear, but when you dig beneath the surface and get to where we live, our attitudes indicate otherwise. The cave-man culture is gone, but the cave-man values remain. At the core of our being we fear the dark; we shiver at the roar of the saber-tooth tiger; and we feel that the blind are a burden to the tribe.

How (in the face of irrefutable evidence to the contrary) are all of these myths maintained? How (with blind persons successfully doing every conceivable kind of job, having families and raising children as effectively as anybody else, and participating fully in the political and social life of the community) can the false assumptions and second-class treatment survive? The answer can be given in a single word—sophistry. It is not, for the most part, that the average citizen on the street wants to do us harm or deprive us of opportunity. It is not (except when their jobs or their vested interests or their egos are involved) that the employees of the governmental and private agencies doing work with the blind wish us ill. Certainly it is not that we ourselves seek to sell ourselves short and limit our horizons. Yet, the myths about blindness remain, bolstered and reinforced by clever and plausible but false and misleading arguments and propositions.

The mistaken beliefs and false concepts are almost universally accepted by the general public, and when people lose their eyesight, they carry with them into blindness the erroneous ideas which they held when they were sighted. They then live the part they are expected to play and feed back to society the misconceptions which it gave them in the first place. Likewise, those who are born blind are taught their roles from the beginning, and unless they are given counterbalancing information, they live as they are expected to live. They think as they are expected to think.

To make matters worse the employees (whether blind or sighted) of the governmental and private agencies established to give service to the blind are also (with notable exceptions) part of the negative process. The urge to feel important is very nearly irresistible. Therefore, when these "experts" tell the blind that they must adjust to a very limited existence and when they tell the sighted that their work is so difficult and complex as to approach the mysterious, they are generally believed. This is so even though what they are dispensing is not "professional" knowledge or the results of research or new truth

but simply old ideas and the fear of the dark, which they absorbed as children. Thus, the circle is complete, with each component giving feedback and reinforcement to the rest of the loop.

Yet, despite the sophistry and the widespread belief that we are inferior, we have made gains. In fact, during the past four decades there has been such an upsurge of progress and achievement as to constitute a veritable revolution. The new element (the root cause) is represented by those of us here tonight. You know what it is as well as I do. It is the National Federation of the Blind.

When Dr. Jacobus tenBroek and the rest of that handful of founders met in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, in 1940 to organize our movement, they understood what they were doing and what it would mean. The Federation was to be the vehicle for concerted action by the blind. It was to be the circuit breaker to stop the flow of clever and plausible but false and misleading ideas which went in a seemingly endless circle from the sighted public to the agencies serving the blind to the blind themselves and back again.

That is what the National Federation of the Blind was created to do, and that is what it has done. We have done it in the past; we are doing it now; and we intend to keep on doing it in the future—regardless of who dislikes it or how much they resent it. Established patterns are comfortable. They require no mental effort, and they give money and power and prestige to various groups and individuals. But we are simply no longer willing to be second-class citizens. We want no strife or confrontation, but we will do what we have to do; and we are absolutely determined to break the circle of destructive sophistry which blights our lives and limits our opportunities. We know who we are, and we will never go back.

One of our problems is the tendency of the general public to try (regardless of the truth of the matter) to make us conform to their notions of what we are. When the facts are at variance with their preconceptions, they tend to forget the facts and remember it and tell it as they thought it was in the first place. No one is worse at this "don't bother me with the facts; I know how it is" attitude than the members of the media.

The July 24, 1981, edition of the News Tribune of Tacoma, Washington, carried a feature article about Glen Latham. Glen, who is totally blind and a staunch Federationist, is a Vietnam veteran. He is also a home owner in Tacoma. The newspaper reporter (a Ms. Willene Anderson) said that she wanted to write an article to help remove the stereotypes and misconceptions about the blind. She came to Glen's house and talked with him at length. You can determine from the letter which Glen wrote to Ms. Anderson's boss whether she told it like it was or simply liked it the way she told it:

The purpose of my letter, [Glen wrote,] is two-fold. The first is concerned with me personally. The second is concerned with the blind in general and the stereotyped view that Ms. Anderson's article encourages.

Ms. Anderson has me quoted as saying, "Our sight is one of many things we take for granted. When it is gone, we must

start our lives all over again, just as children learning—only this time in the dark." I do not recall making such a statement. Children learn to walk and talk. They do not have to be taught to see. I did not have to learn to walk or talk again.

I recall mentioning to Ms. Anderson that my mother had died. Ms. Anderson made no inquiries as to when my mother died or if I lived with her. I made no statement which could even possibly have implied that I lived with my mother after my return from the war. When I came back from Vietnam in February of 1968, I spent six months in Balboa Naval Hospital in San Diego, six months in rehabilitation in Palo Alto, then six months back in the hospital for further operations. My mother died a month before my release from the hospital. Had Ms. Anderson asked, she would have known this.

Ms. Anderson leads her readers to believe that after I recovered from my wounds, I went to live with my mother. Then she died, leaving me all alone to pick up the pieces of my life once again. Stating that I lived with my mother is a complete falsehood.

Ms. Anderson has me quoted as saying, "It used to be so important to me, the outdoors—things I could see. I had always dreamed of living in this area." This is false. During the interview, Ms. Anderson said, and I quote, "Glen, you are very athletic. What do you think about the handicapped climbers of Mt. Rainier?" Ms. Anderson assumed that I am athletic; I am not. I made no mention of liking the outdoors or of being athletically inclined. I did not tell her that I had "always dreamed of living in this area." I stated that I had always liked living in this area. There is a big difference between "liking" and "dreaming."

When I was looking for a home to purchase, Ms. Anderson implies that I had to take into account numerous special considerations. She states that "many homebuyers are looking for things that are aesthetically pleasing." This implies that I was not. Why wouldn't I want a home that is aesthetically pleasing? Of course it was an important factor!

Ms. Anderson states that the house doesn't have any "extra barriers, like steep stairs or sharp corners." Whose house did she look at? From the street it is obvious that the house has a second floor. She made no inquiries concerning the architectural design of the place. But how could she have missed the upstairs, even if she missed the basement? There are, in fact, two flights of what are considered "steep" stairs in my home. One flight leads to the second floor, and the other leads to the basement, where I spend most of my time working at my desk. My home could not be considered small. I have 2,400 square feet of living space. The previous owners of the house were not visually impaired or physically disabled in any way, and the house remains structurally and architecturally the same as it was when I bought it.

Ms. Anderson also states that I "get help in mowing my lawn and other outside work." She made no inquiries concerning yard work. The fact of the matter is that I have hired a professional lawn service. The lawn service I use serves over 90 homes in the Tacoma area, and very few of these homes are occupied by the disabled or the elderly. The hiring

of the lawn service does not mean that I cannot do the work myself. Why do the other homeowners have the same service?

Ms. Anderson states that my relatives help me. My cousin and her son live with me. I am helping her go to college. We have a living arrangement that is helpful to both of us. She has lived with me for the past year. Prior to that she lived in California, and for almost five years I lived alone. I was not, and am still not, dependent on my relatives.

Ms. Anderson states that my furnishings are simple. I think this is a commentary on her taste and not my furniture. She states that "furniture in the middle of the room would be bothersome." Bothersome to whom? Perhaps she didn't see the coffee table that stands in front of the ten foot sofa that she was sitting on during the interview. Perhaps she didn't see the large ottoman which sits in front of the large round swivel chair that I was sitting in.

Ms. Anderson made no inquiries as to who does the grocery shopping. Yet, she says in her article that I rely on my relatives to do it. Sometimes I shop with them; sometimes I don't. My cousin and I usually shop for groceries once a month as a matter of convenience because of our busy schedules. We buy large quantities, requiring the use of a car—which, I may add, I own.

Ms. Anderson also stated that "housecleaning chores are mostly done by relatives." How does she know this? She certainly didn't ask. If she had, she would have found that we all share equally in the housework. Everyone keeps their own room clean, including my cousin's seven-year-old son. We all share in keeping the rest of the house clean. She has me quoted as saying that I can cook, iron clothes, and do household chores. However, she turns right around and states that "housecleaning chores are mostly done by relatives."

I am sure Ms. Anderson felt she was doing a great service to me and the blind community. I also realize that for a newspaper to attract its readers, it must have "good copy," and that in many cases a story must be dramatized to emphasize a point. However, this article is so distorted and false that I feel it has done more damage than good. The attitudes she expresses are more sophisticated than the stereotyped sob story of the blind man selling pencils on the street corner, but the fundamentals are the same.

This is Glen Latham's letter, and it sums up an entire system—the clever and plausible but false and misleading ideas and beliefs which have blocked our progress and blighted our lives through the centuries. The reporter's intentions were doubtless good and her motives the best, but the damage is no less severe and the hurt no easier to bear—not to mention which, a lot of us are getting tired of having our road to hell paved with other people's good intentions. More often than not, such people act shocked if we try to set them straight and feel angry if we are not grateful for the efforts they have made. Our conduct is at variance with the humility they expect us to demonstrate. We do not wish to be arrogant or truculent, but we are not prepared to sit passively by and be pictured as what we are not. Let people think what they will and call us what they please. We are simply no

longer willing to be second-class citizens. We have learned the truth about ourselves and our blindness, and (regardless of the consequences) we intend to live that truth. We know who we are, and we will never go back.

If the Glen Latham story were an isolated instance, it would be regrettable but not worth making much noise about. However, it is not isolated but typical. The Jaycees of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, encouraged the blind of the area to become members. With no further details one would applaud the action. However, the Jaycees established a segregated chapter for the blind—and what do you suppose the chapter was named? It was called the Deadeye Chapter. If the name was meant to be funny, it is sick. If it was not, it is sicker. Karen Mayry and our other South Dakota members are fighting hard to combat such madness, and we are making progress; but the road stretches far ahead.

The United States Association for Blind Athletes is relatively noncontroversial, but in 1979 a seemingly innocent event concerning that organization occurred which demonstrates why the sophistries about blindness are so attractive to the members of the sighted public. Jeff Hopper is Vice President of Marketing and Administration for a savings and loan association in the Puget Sound area. He is also volunteer president of the Northwest Chapter of the United States Association for Blind Athletes. In a magazine column he wrote as follows:

The concept of winning has long been taught through athletic competition. It is a priority in our society and most people who would be considered "successful" can relate to some form of athletic competition.

Until recently, however, blind and visually impaired persons in the United States have been excluded from athletic participation. More importantly, the lack of athletic participation for the visually handicapped has restricted their learning of the winning process.

I am sure that Mr. Hopper is both generous and sincere, and at first glance there would seem to be nothing wrong with his statement. But look again. Is it really necessary for the blind (or, for that matter, the sighted) to engage in athletics to learn the concept of winning or understand how to be successful? If it is, and if the blind never had the opportunity to participate in athletics before the establishment of the United States Association for Blind Athletes, then how very much more important and significant is Mr. Hopper's volunteer work than it would be if he were simply performing a run-of-the-mill civic or community project. Of course, the whole proposition is nothing but nonsense and sophistry. A great many of the most successful people the world has ever known have not had the slightest interest in athletics; and as we know from personal experience, there are (and always have been) plenty of ways for the blind to learn the concept of winning without engaging in athletics. This is not to take anything away from the United States Association for Blind Athletes or Mr. Hopper. It is only to point out one of the reasons why

sophistries about the blind are so attractive. They permit sighted people with feelings of inferiority to feel important.

Even though the actions of the newspaper reporter, the Jaycees, and Mr. Hopper do us harm, there may be some excuse for their behavior. They are not constantly dealing with blind people, and they do not have the opportunity on a daily basis to observe the problems created by the misconceptions and wrong ideas which they help to promote. For the most part they do not claim to be experts.

Unfortunately the same cannot be said for the employees of the governmental and private agencies established to give service to the blind. Their much vaunted "professionalism," their very rationale for being, rests upon the premise that they know what blindness is about and how to deal with it. In the manner of doctors dealing with medical matters, they hold themselves out as the possessors of correct information, and they say they can teach that information not only to the public but also to those of us who are blind.

Yet, much of the literature which comes from these agencies is worse than what we get from the public. As an example, I call your attention to a book published by the American Foundation for the Blind in 1974 and reissued in 1978. It was written by a person with impressive credentials named Anne Yeadon, and it is entitled Toward Independence—The Use of Instructional Objectives In Teaching Daily Living Skills to the Blind. If there was ever a case of destructive sophistry and just plain drivel, this book is it. If what it teaches represents all we can expect in the way of independence, who can wonder at the fear people have about blindness and the low esteem in which we are so often held!

This treatise on "independence" has sections on: table behavior, domestic tasks, kitchen equipment, and cooking. Let us look at the section on table behavior. It contains these subparts:

Seating Self at a Table
The Locating Technique
An Informal Place Setting
Exploring Contents of a Plate of Food
Use of a Knife and Fork to Cut Food
Placing Knife on Plate When Not in Use
Checking for Food Dropped from Plate
Placing of Knife and Fork at Close of Meal
Differentiating Pepper and Salt
Applying Pepper and Salt
Pouring Cold Liquids
Adding Sugar to a Drink
Use of the Spoon for Stirring
Obtaining Food From a Relish Dish
Boning a Fish
Serving Self at the Table
Pouring of Hot Liquids
Carrying Containers of Food/Liquid
Drinking Soup With the Aid of a Spoon
"Scooping" Food With the Aid of a Fork
The "Buffer" Technique
Buttering a Piece of Bread
Cutting Salad With a Knife and Fork
Use of a fork to eat desserts
Handling and Eating Dry Foods
Cutting Fried Eggs With the Aid of a Knife and Fork
Cutting a Piece of Pie/Cake
Lighting a Cigarette
Using an Ash Tray

I think we can get the tone of the book by examining two of these items.

First, let us see what it says about "Placing Knife on Plate When Not in Use":

TITLE: Demonstrating the placing of the knife on the plate.

OBJECTIVE: During the course of a meal the student will demonstrate the ability to place the knife on the top right hand side of the plate. This will be done in accordance with the following criteria:

1. with the handle of the knife overlapping the edge of the plate,

2. without the knife being pushed over or into the plate,

3. ensuring ease in relocating knife by using same position each time.

TECHNIQUE (Manual Dexterity): The student, during the course of a meal, may decide he does not need the use of the knife. In order to relocate the knife easily, it is suggested that it be placed in the same position on the plate each time, e.g. across the top right-hand corner of the plate, between a 12 o'clock and 3 o'clock position. [I might inject here that most of the plates I deal with do not have corners—but back to the text.]

In order to achieve the above, the student will bring his right hand to the right side edge of the plate—but will not allow the knife to touch the table. The thumb will locate an approximate 3 o'clock position. The handle of the knife will be placed in this position, with the tip of the handle slightly overlapping the edge of the plate—this allows the student to relocate the knife by running his fingers along the outer edge of the plate and not placing his hand into the plate.

Safety Awareness: The student will attempt to retain a mental picture of the position of the knife, as the fork, when being used, may inadvertently push the knife from the plate.

That is what it says, and for the life of me I cannot understand the comment about safety. Moreover, one gets the distinct impression that the author is speaking to a child, programming a robot, or talking to a person who has never had contact with civilization. When an individual becomes blind, that individual does not automatically lose all of the knowledge and abilities that he or she ever possessed; nor does the person become retarded.

But back to the book. What is said about the knife is no worse than what is said about the spoon:

TITLE: Demonstrating the use of a spoon for stirring.

OBJECTIVE: When presented with a container of liquid and a spoon the student will demonstrate the ability to use the spoon to stir the liquid. This will be done in accordance with the following criteria:

1. by placing the spoon into the container without causing the container to overturn or overflow.

2. by introducing the "stirring motion" without the liquid overflowing.

3. by replacing the spoon in its original position without disturbing other items.

TECHNIQUE (Manual Dexterity): The

student will hold the spoon in the same manner as a soup spoon, except that it will be held with the inner bowl facing the student's body and in a vertical position when placed in the container. [I interrupt to wonder how else except in a vertical position one could hold the spoon if the container has any depth and if it is in an upright position with its bottom on the table—but back to the learned text.]

If the container has a handle the student will grasp it firmly. If the container does not have a handle the student will place the thumb of the free hand over the top, side edge and the remaining fingers will lie just below the thumb along the side of the bowl. The spoon will be brought to the container and the bowl of the spoon placed into the liquid.

Finger Manipulation and Safety Awareness: The spoon will be turned, usually in clockwise motion, around the circumference of the container, by a gentle circular motion of the wrist without scraping the sides or bottom of the container. The spoon will then be returned to its original position. If, however, the liquid is thick, the handle of the spoon should be lightly tapped on the side of the container—to remove excess—before returning to its original position.

NOTE: The instructor will hold her hand over the student's and vice versa, and demonstrate the smoothness of the task. A student low on concepts will probably require extensive practice to achieve successful results.

I find myself very nearly overwhelmed —and also beset by a number of questions. What if the she is a he? What if I don't want to move the spoon in a clock-wise direction? What if I don't want to grasp the handle of the container or drape my fingers over the top side edge? It is enough to drive one to drink—after, of course, the spoon has been removed as a matter of safety.

Remember that there is an entire book full of this idiocy and that this is not an isolated but a typical example of what we are getting from the agencies. Is it any wonder that the public is reinforced in its misconceptions and that the blind (especially blind children who grow up in the system or newly blind persons who fall into its clutches) come to doubt their worth and belittle their abilities!

With this sort of madness coming not just from the public but also from the agencies it is no wonder that blind persons (especially those not having the perspective which is gained by the information, the shared experiences, and the reinforcement which come from membership in the National Federation of the Blind) often develop offbeat and unrealistic devices for trying to gain prestige and for not appearing to be like other blind people. There is the Uncle Remus technique of pretending to be crafty and possessed of special powers, which is typified by a quote attributed to a blind man who was formerly in the Maryland legislature. In the article concerning his death in the July 31, 1979, Baltimore Sun this passage appears: "As a legislator, he maintained that his blindness was an aid as well as a handicap. He once told a reporter that he developed an increased sense of hearing because of his loss of

sight, which he said allowed him to pick up word of political deals being made far down a hall or across a committee room."

Of course, we know that such claims are utter nonsense, playing on the credibility of the public and reinforcing and feeding back to the sighted their own superstitions. Or perhaps the man didn't say it at all. Maybe it was simply made up by the reporter as a good line and a plausible story. Whichever way it happened, this sort of thing does not achieve the objective of making the blind seem more capable. It harms us and increases the general notion of our abnormality.

Then, there is another technique. In the May 10, 1984, Washington Post there is an article headlined "Blind Student Seizes Challenges." The article details the accomplishments of a blind student—president of the student body, floor president of his dormitory, administrative assistant to the College Democrats, and a lot more of the same. In the midst of it all, this passage occurs: "Schroeder lives in a house off campus with three other students. He usually walks the 20 minutes from home to campus alone. No dog, no cane, no guide.

"Using any of these aids would mean 'admitting that he is blind,' said Andrew Sherman, a good friend. 'And he doesn't envision himself as a blind person. He sees himself as a person who is blind.'"

This is not independence. It is pathetic self-deception. Again, it does not elevate the image or improve the standing of the blind—not even of the student in question. The very article we are discussing proves the point by talking about how the student gets lost and spends hours trying to find his way home, and how he is very proud of not having to ask for help.

So the circle is complete—the misconceptions of the public, the acceptance and strengthening of those misconceptions by the agencies, the passthrough to the blind, and the feedback once more to the public: each component reinforcing the myths and false beliefs of the other and each using the other as authority. In such circumstances is it any wonder that I recently received a letter from an inventor who said that he had constructed a special toilet paper holder for the blind and that he would like us to help him market it? Is it any wonder that another inventor thinks the blind cannot clean themselves at all and should only use toilet paper for drying after being washed by the special spray he has constructed? In his letter of October 25, 1983, the inventor says: "The blind will really appreciate the use of the Hygeia cleaning because the designed spray cleans quickly and thorough. Drying is complete by only using a few sheets of tissue or a small cloth."

Is it any wonder that a man wrote to me a few months ago saying that he would rather be dead than blind! In his own words: "I have just been told I have the narrow type glaucoma that might lead to an emergency. I'm scared. Please send any prevention data. Couldn't live without eyesight. Wouldn't want to."

So what does it mean—all of this analyzing of the circle of sophistry about blindness, all of this talk about where we are and where we have been? What is our present situation, and what lies ahead? In the first place let us

recognize that, with all of our problems, we have it better today than we have ever had it before in all of our history. In ancient times we were exposed to die on the hillsides as babies. In the middle ages we were dressed in donkey ears and forced to fight each other at country fairs for public sport. In the early years of the present century we were treated with more apparent kindness, but as we know, appearances are not always what they seem. We were no longer put out to die on the hillsides or forced to fight each other for the entertainment of our neighbors, but the substance of public attitudes remained the same. There were no jobs, no opportunities, and no hope.

I know from personal experience (and so do many of the rest of you) the pain and despair of continued isolation and nothing to do. Some of us broke free. The rest remained captive—some for a lifetime, and some still existing. There comes a time when the spirit dies and the body lives on. It is a close question as to whether it is better to die as a child or continue to exist year after year in the living death which many of the blind have endured. Yes, I know the implications of the question; and no, I am not exaggerating. I mean exactly and literally what I say.

But, of course, our answer to the question is simple: we are no longer willing to accept either one of these alternatives. We have learned to be free, and we intend to keep it that way. We have eaten at the table of liberty, and we will never again settle for the crumbs on the floor.

As our movement continues to strengthen, the circle of sophistry weakens. There is much good will toward the blind, and while it is true that some people resent our progress, most do not. As they learn who we are and what we are, the majority join with us. With the work of the Federation in South Dakota the Deadeye Chapter of the Jaycees lasted for less than a year. Our television and radio announcements blanket the airwaves, and we have had major network coverage in recent months. We confront the airlines when they try to make us take segregated seating. We find new jobs in expanded areas of employment. Above all, an increasing number of us are living our Federationism on a daily basis, knowing it to be our passport to freedom.

In the days ahead our task will not be easy. We know it, and we are prepared. Whatever the sacrifice, we will make it. Whatever the price, we will pay it. We must finish our march to acceptance and full membership in society. Our heritage requires it; our purpose proclaims it; our humanity demands it. This cause of ours is a sacred trust. It is worthy of all that we have or can ever hope to be—and we shall not fail. My brothers and my sisters, the future is ours. Come! Join me in the battle, and we will make it all come true!

COMPETING ON TERMS OF EQUALITY

by Kenneth Jernigan

As Federationists know, Job Opportunities for the Blind (JOB) is a project jointly sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor and the National Federation of the Blind. At a JOB seminar held in Baltimore late in 1980, I made the following remarks. They were substantially reprinted in the Summer and Fall, 1981, issues of Dialogue magazine.

I believe that whether or not blind persons have ready access to the job market is important not only to blind people who are employed but to those who may be seeking employment. It is important to every segment of the blind population. People who are past the employment years are affected by whether blind persons can get jobs.

To make this clear, all I have to say is this: During the years when a black person in this country could not find employment except in shoeshining or in the very lowest-paid of janitorial jobs, it affected the way society treated every black person—those who were not hunting employment as well as those who were. And so in that sense every blind person has a stake in what happens in our JOB project and in upgrading jobs for blind persons.

Whether or not we believe that as blind persons we really are as good as others—that is, whether we believe we are employable—has something to do with how we look at ourselves—what kind of confidence we will have, how we will expect people to treat us, and what we will expect we can do. I know (and probably you do, too) situations where blind people, men or women, have got themselves engaged to sighted people and the families of the sighted persons have been moved almost to violence, thinking their child had gone mad by wanting to marry a blind person. It's all tied up with jobs. In the past we haven't known blind people who have had jobs that were prestigious in the community. We haven't known blind people who were persons that other people hoped they could be like, and had to come to for favors, and all the other things that make for desirability.

The trouble is that blind people, being part of the culture, have accepted that notion of themselves too often and have, therefore, done much to make it come true. It's a vicious circle.

I know many people who say, "Of course, I believe that as a blind person I am as good as anybody else." Very often they simply don't know what they are saying. Very often they are lying in their teeth, but usually don't know it.

Let me give you an example from my own experience. I went to college. I had, I believe, a rather pleasing personality. We all think we have a pleasant personality, I suppose. But I had some objective evidence. I could use mine to some good effect when I wanted to.

Early in my freshman year I went to one of my professors and said to him, "I want to do everything that's needed. I don't want any special favors or privileges. I want to compete on terms of equality with the other students here. I really want to be able to perform, and I believe I can. As I have said, I don't want you to give me special favors or privileges. Once in a while there may be a few things that I will need to do a little differently, but I hope there won't be many such things and that they won't be sufficient to make a difference in my overall performance.

"Specifically," I said, "since fitting footnotes onto a sheet of typing constitutes some problem, I would hope that I would be able to omit footnotes from term papers and themes. I shall certainly do all the research involved, and will type the papers myself."

That is what I told my professor. It sounds pretty good. Don't you think? It's a fairly plausible argument. I put all of the right words: "no special favors, no special treatment, no unreasonable privileges." Then, I asked the professor, "Is it all right if I proceed in that manner?"

His answer was blunt and to the point.

"Hell no," he barked. "It's not all right. Look, you have come here telling me that you can compete on terms of equality, and you have made all of this speech about how you want to do it on equal terms with everybody else. You also say you are capable of doing competitive work in college. Now, you either can or you can't.

"I could let you get by without the footnotes, and probably nobody would criticize me for it. But when you are through with my classes and are graduating, you are going to want a recommendation. At that time you'll get your feelings hurt if I say, 'He's not capable of competing on terms of real equality with others, but he can do a good job considering that he's blind.' You won't like it if I say that. Therefore, you are either going to pass my courses in such a way that I can honestly give you good recommendations, or I'll flunk you. Take it either way you want it."

That was one of the finest things that ever happened to me, because I had gone there with a good line prepared to snow the man, and I am not sure that I even knew that I was trying to do it. I typed his papers, by the way, and put the footnotes on them. There was no problem at all in doing it. I am afraid that if he had permitted it I might have taken the easy way out and paid a terrible price for it.

Not all blind persons are as lucky as I was. Too many are faced with people who say to them, "You don't need to do this." Unfortunately too many blind people accept the proffered assistance and (more often than not) never realize the high price they pay for the success they achieve in avoiding whatever it is they get out of or are talked into not doing.

When you are blind how do you manage to do the different things you need to do? Very often we begin by assuming that we need a lot more so-called "accommodation" than we do. Remember: There is no such thing as a free lunch. You pay for everything.

I want to jump forward to a talk that I had with an executive from IBM not long ago. I don't think the blind person involved would mind if I told you, be-

cause she and I laughed about it later—but it wasn't funny to her at the time.

We had a blind woman come here to the National Center for three months to work with us on the talking typewriter that IBM has developed. She had tried to get jobs in the past and had had one that hadn't worked out very well. We put her on the talking typewriter, and we all made good speeches. You know the pattern: "This will be a good chance to test out the machine, but also you'll be treated like any other employee."

She had a tendency to go and sit down in other people's offices and talk. She was blind, and everybody had always told her that she was a genius if she could do anything at all—and, of course, we all like to be told we're geniuses, every one of us. We all like to be told that we are wonderful. Often the reason we are told such things is not complimentary, but we don't recognize it. Often the reasoning is something like this: "Considering that you're blind, it's wonderful that you can do what (if you were sighted) would be taken as just an ordinary thing." That's not complimentary.

Anyway, this woman came in one day to Mrs. Walhof (who was her supervisor) and said she had done 50 form letters in a given period of time. She was obviously pleased about it and wanted to be petted for it. But Mrs. Walhof said, "That's not enough. If you think that way, you won't be able to compete on terms of equality. It's not enough."

The woman was crushed. She cried and felt ill-used. And so the lady from IBM who was in charge of training came in pretty soon and said to me: "I think you are being a little hard on her. You know, that's really quite good for a secretary. I want to talk to you about her because I think she feels that she's a little hard pressed. Maybe you are expecting too much."

I said, "Look. You stick to handling typewriters, and let me handle training blind people. Part of the problem we as blind people have is directly traceable to people like you. Without ever meaning to do it, you have kept blind people from getting jobs because of your lousy attitudes." After that kind of hard beginning I softened it down a bit. I had started out with shock tactics on her, but we got to be very good friends. I said to her, "Tell me (and really be honest): If this woman were sighted and a good secretary, would you regard her performance on those letters as satisfactory?"

After some hesitation she said: "Well, no, I guess I wouldn't. But after all, you've got to take into account that she does have extra problems."

"No, I don't have to take that into account," I said. "That's exactly why blind people don't have jobs. A blind typist does not need to perform at less capacity than a sighted typist. You don't believe that a blind person can perform up to capacity; and so, of course, you're having trouble with blind persons getting jobs. It's your own fault."

A couple of weeks later the IBM trainer came back to me, having visited around the country, and said, "I've thought about it a lot, and I want to tell you something. I've been to some other places (these other training sites we have) and the typists there expect me, because I'm sighted, to do everything from carry their coffee to go out and shop for them." She said, "They're

not really being expected to perform up to par, and I guess I'd always taken it for granted that they shouldn't be. But I had to do something about it, and this person you have here may really become employable as a result of what you're doing. I was wrong."

"Okay, I'm glad you can see that," I said. "We are going to help the person we are training become able to be a really good secretary."

Then, I got the IBM executive into my office (the one who was in overall charge of the talking typewriter project), and we had a long talk. I had come to know him. We had spent as much as eight or ten hours together, and we could talk frankly.

"You have asked me about your IBM Talking Typewriter," I said to him. And he said, "Yes, because we're having trouble selling it. We're not sure the market is out there."

"I think I could help you learn how to sell more of those typewriters," I said. "I think it's your own fault that you're not selling them."

He asked why.

"Because you haven't learned the lesson that the Gillette Razor people learned so well," I told him. "They wanted to sell blades, but they realized that they had to sell razors, too. Suppose they were selling blades and thought they were good, but they thought their razors were so bad that they were second-rate and inferior. Then the Schick people would have it all over them. They'd beat them in sales every time.

"You people wrote a special manual for blind operators of the Mag Card II typewriter, and it was one of the poorest pieces of business I've ever seen. You had a token blind woman employed at IBM who didn't believe in herself, but you people thought she was a genius because she was able to perform at all, and you had to give her something to occupy her time. What resulted was a manual written up especially for blind people. I don't know whether she wrote it, or whether you had somebody else do it. Maybe you had some more blind people employed. I don't know. Some of my colleagues and I tried the manual, and it didn't work. It assumed that the blind were morons. So we scrapped it and taped your regular manual for the Mag Card Typewriter and used it to train blind people. We got jobs for a lot of them.

"Now, you are going out and trying to sell your talking typewriter, but you don't really believe that blind people can perform on a par with others. How are you going to sell employers on buying talking typewriters to employ people that you don't really believe are employable? That's your problem."

"Well," he said, "I hadn't looked at it like that. I don't know. Maybe that's it, but I just hadn't looked at it that way."

"Let me put the question to you another way," I said. "Do you believe that you are necessarily more fortunate than I simply because you're sighted and I'm blind?"

He said, "Well, yeah, I guess I do."

Then, I said, "Okay. Let's see what it is that you think you have that makes you that way—whether it's the natural wish of every person to feel superior to somebody and the insecurity which all of us have (at least, a little of it) or if it's really that you've got that much on the ball. Let's see what it is you've got.

"Let me tell you the test I use. The world is competitive. It always will be. There isn't any way to make it otherwise. Whether we're under Communism, Fascism, the church, or a so-called democracy—it doesn't matter whether the capitalists run it, or the labor unions. It's competitive. Anybody who tells you otherwise is deceiving you—and probably is doing quite well in the world, as he moves on while you stay behind to meditate on the merits of his philosophy.

"Let's take it on that basis. By competitive I mean this: There are fewer things out there to fill wants than there are wants for those things. Therefore, necessarily whatever it is—whether jobs, honors, loaves of bread, dollars, cars, women, men, liquor, houses, Bibles, whatever—there are always fewer of whatever it is than there are people who want it. Somebody is going to get left out. I'm telling you that I don't think blind people have to get left out any more often than sighted people. I believe there are too many other things involved.

"Let me speak to you. You and I are at least fairly close to the same age. Are you really sure that if you want something in the world and I want it, and you and I both set out to get it with all we can—are you sure you're going to beat me out and get it?"

"Well, no," he said.

I said, "I'm not either. Think about it. I don't know whether you're more fortunate than I or not. You may be. But I doubt it."

He said he hadn't looked at it like that.

"That's one reason I might get whatever it is we are competing for and you might not," I said.

Now, let me leave the IBM typewriter and my conversation with the IBM executive. Let me go back and talk to you about the specifics of jobs. When I was in California at the Orientation Center for the Blind, I talked with people all along about blindness, trying to help blind persons come to realize that they could compete on terms of equality with others. I remember an individual who was an electrician before he became blind. He was 32 years old. He had been an electrician since before he was 20. One Sunday afternoon when he was working in his back yard a grinder blew up and blinded him. We got him at the Orientation Center very shortly afterward.

He came in with a kidding rather shallow kind of bravado, a sort of gaiety. He said he knew that he could learn to perform as a blind person as well as he'd ever performed as a sighted person.

It was obviously phony. It was clear he didn't believe anything of the sort. After he had been there about two or three weeks, he said to me, "I have really been thinking about it, and in a sense I guess blindness may have been a good thing for me, because it caused me to re-evaluate my life and make the changes that I would like to have made all along. I never really was happy as an electrician. I think I'd like to get into another line of work."

"What would you like to do?" I asked.

"Something that would let me get out and travel around," he said.

"Like what?" I asked.

"Maybe I could do piano tuning," he said.

I'm sure I don't have to tell you what that meant. He thought that was what blind people could do, and he was still trying to tell himself that he was a

brave fellow, and maybe he really half way convinced himself that's what he wanted to do.

All I said was, "We'll think about it." I changed the subject and began talking to him about the weather, and passed on.

After he had been at the center four or five months, he said to me one day, "You know, I was really phony about that piano tuning. I guess I thought that was all I could do as a blind person. But I've sort of changed my mind. Now, I can see some things that I didn't then. I don't want to be a piano tuner. What I really would like to do is go to college."

"Tell me about it," I said. "Tell me why."

"I think I would like to get into some sort of work helping my fellow blind," he said.

I said, "You know, you are an awful liar."

In these days of civil rights I suppose he could have hailed me up before the courts for having abused him. I might have had truth as a defense. I don't know.

Anyway, his response was: "But how could a blind person be an electrician?"

"I don't know," I said. "I'm not an electrician. I don't know anything about electricians. Let's work on it. You know something about being an electrician, and I know something about blindness. I don't know whether you can be an electrician, but let's try it. Let's see what you can do."

Well, we did. He went back and got a job as a full-time electrician, and he worked at it quite well and satisfactorily. But I might have taken him seriously, or he might have taken himself seriously in those earlier false starts. If he hadn't had some help in becoming deconditioned to what society had taught him to believe, he would have had a different kind of existence.

He taught me a lesson, too, by the way. He said, "You tell me that you believe a blind person ought to have an equal opportunity to be an electrician. Your house has some wiring problems. How about if I come over and work on your house? Are you willing for me to do that?"

I said, "Yes, I guess so if you'll give me some idea about how you propose to do it."

To which he said, "I'm a licensed electrician. Would you ask a sighted man to give you that kind of proof?"

I said, "No, I really wouldn't."

"Well, why, then, do you discriminate against me?" he asked.

I had taught him fairly well, I suppose. "Mark up a point for you," I told him. "I don't care how you do it. If you believe you can do it, come and have a whack at it."

When you get a job, much of what happens to you is, of course, determined by whether the job is suitable for you and whether your employer and your colleagues give you an equal chance. But it also has to do with the way you approach it—what you believe you can do. Here are some examples from my own experience:

Once upon a time I sold life insurance—a most interesting occupation. I had a big rate book in print. I don't know how each of you would have tried to deal with it, but I could not always afford to hire somebody to go with me and read it for me. I was trying to make a living, not be an executive. I

couldn't put it into Braille. I didn't have enough reader time for that and even if I had, it would have meant carrying around volumes. So that wouldn't have been practical.

I had another problem: The company kept changing the rate book as new policies and procedures came along. So what was I to do?

I could have asked my prospective customers to look up the information I needed, but that wouldn't have worked because the book contained information I didn't want them to have. I wasn't trying to hoodwink them. But if you're a wholesaler, you don't ask the people you're selling to to look in the manufacturer's catalog and see what kind of markup you make. It isn't good psychology. Besides, most of my clients would not efficiently have been able to find what I wanted. But what would have been even worse was that it would have destroyed their confidence in me. They wouldn't have believed that I was competent to handle their insurance business if I had done it that way.

So what did I do? I could have cried about it or said, "Well, that shows a blind person can't be an insurance salesman. Right there it is. I tried, but tell me how I'm going to do it?" People often come to me and say, "Here is this job. Tell me how I'm going to do it."

I can't. I'm not motivated to sit down and spend a day or two of my time trying to figure out something which, if it can be figured out, they ought to be figuring out themselves. If it can't be figured out, why should I spend my time trying to do what can't be done?

I either had to figure this out or stop selling insurance. By the way, when I'd tried to get the insurance job, the first company had said they wouldn't hire me but would let me sell in the name of another established agent and split commissions with him if I wanted to. I said no, I didn't think I'd do that. Then, I went off and found a company that would put me on.

So I tried to discover if there was any way to figure out shortcuts to work with the rate book, a formula. I learned that if I knew the annual premium on a policy, the semiannual premium (if a client preferred to pay it that way) would be 51 percent. The quarterly was 26 percent, and the monthly premium was 10 percent. So right there I saved myself lots of columns. It isn't very hard to figure out 51 percent of something, or 26 percent, or 10 percent. Ten percent is easy—all you have to do is move a decimal.

Then, I started on the other end of it, the hard part. I learned that if I knew what an individual of a given age would be charged for a particular policy, there was a formula by which I could determine what that particular policy would cost an individual of any age. I arbitrarily took age 26, and (knowing the premium on an ordinary life insurance policy for a person of that age) I could figure the semiannual, quarterly, or monthly premium for a person of 50, 60, or any other age. Since we mostly sold fifteen or twenty kinds of policies (there were a few exotic things, but they were not ordinarily sold), I could put all the information I needed (name of policy and annual premium for age 26) on a Braille card or two and put them in my pocket so nobody would even know I was looking at them.

It occurred to me that my competitors

might also have such data available. Rate books are rate books. So I thought, "If ours are like that, I wonder what theirs are like." So I lured some of my competitors out to my house to sell me insurance and deduced a number of things about their policies—unraveled the formulas and found that they worked.

One lonesome, rainy night I went to see a fellow who was quite well-to-do, a man who could buy (and intended to buy) a relatively large life insurance policy. It was going to make somebody a whopping good commission. There are always fewer things than there are people wanting them, and in this case a lot of us wanted his insurance business—but only one of us was going to get it. And it didn't matter whether you explained it, or called yourself blind, or said, "I can tell you why I didn't do it." Only one thing counted: did you or didn't you? That was the test.

So I went over to see him, and he said he'd been thinking about buying this insurance. I said, "Well, if you do, it will cost you this amount."

"Suppose," he said, "I decided I want to pay it on a semi-annual, twice-a-year, basis?"

"You could do that," I said, "and if you did, it would cost you this amount."

"I've considered buying from this other company," he said.

"Well," I answered, "they're a good company, and if you buy the policy from them, it will cost you this." And I went on to tell him as honestly as I could the advantages and disadvantages of the other company's policy and of mine.

Then, he said, "I'm going to give you my insurance business, because I think you know what you're doing. I had a fellow out here the other night who didn't know a thing. Every time I asked him any question he had to look it up in that little book he had."

Now, I'm as lazy as anybody else. We all have a tendency to that, and there's nothing wrong with being lazy if you properly understand that it means extracting as much as you can for the labor you exert. That's perfectly proper. It's just that a lot of people don't know how to be lazy. If you'll work hard up front, it will allow you more time to do whatever it is you want to do, and you can do it more effectively, and have more time left over to do something else. If I had had sight, the chances are I never would have been motivated to have hunted up all that stuff and reasoned it out. But once I did, it proved to be a tremendous advantage and an asset. Yet, a lot of people would have told me that I was handicapped in selling insurance because I was blind and couldn't read my rate book. And they would have been right—unless I did something about it.

I want to tell you something else. I did a stint teaching school, and I want to tell you some of the methods I used. They are not the only methods a teacher might use, but they worked for me. I taught for a while in a school for the blind, in a day when blind teachers were not highly regarded. The question was: Could I carry my own weight, and (specifically) could I keep discipline?

At the beginning of the first class I made a speech to the students. I said to them, "We are entering on a new relationship." (That sounds nice and bureaucratic, doesn't it?) "We're entering on a new relationship, and we can live at peace, or we can engage in war. If we engage in a peaceful relationship, all

of us can live happily. On the other hand, if you choose to go to war with me, I have certain advantages that you do not possess. You may have some that I don't possess—and some that I haven't thought of. But let me tell you what mine are.

"I can give you assignments, or not. I can assign things to you in a minute or two that will give you a great deal of trouble, either to do or find ways of avoiding doing. One day (whether you now know it or not) it will help you if you have nice recommendations written on your reports from me—not a lot, but it will help some.

"But beyond that, if you try to engage in conflict with me, there are times when you will succeed in putting things over on me, because all of the brains didn't come here when I got here. So you'll win sometimes. But on the other side of that is this: All of the brains didn't come here when you came, so you'll lose sometimes, and I will catch you. It remains to be seen, then, whether or not I can make it desirable for you to try to live in peace with me. I choose peace if I can have it, but I will engage in war if I must." I made them that speech and passed on.

I had a student named Johnny Lindenfellow, who was at that time in the seventh or eighth grade. He took every occasion to be as mangy as he knew how, and he was an expert at it. I tried to reason with him; I tried to be good to him; I pleaded with him about the good of the school and humanity; I talked with him about living and letting live. But nothing worked. There was no getting along with him. Nothing made any difference. In fact, whenever I would lay some punishment on him, he seemed to glory in it as being proof that he was a tough customer.

So I changed tactics. One day when he had done something I didn't like, I said, "Johnny, you will please stay after class."

I could feel him expand with pleasure. He knew I wasn't allowed to kill him, that there was some limit as to what I could do.

After class, when we were alone, I said, "Johnny, it's been a long conflict between you and me, and I want to tell you now what I'm going to do. As you know, I teach other English classes in this school. In about two hours I'm going to be teaching an English class, and I'm going to provoke an incident in that class so that somebody misbehaves. It's not difficult to think up some way to get it done. Then, I will say to the student who misbehaves, 'Why can't you be a good little boy like Johnny Lindenfellow?' I will do that over and over and over until I make you the most hated boy in this school. You will fight fifty times every day. I will call you a good little boy to every class I have until the day comes that they will beat you to death. You will fight all of the time."

"You wouldn't do that to me," he protested.

"Oh, but I would!" I said. "It's clear that I can think it up . . . I did; I've already told you about it. And I will do it."

He said, "Look, I'd like to get along."

"So would I," I said. "I'm perfectly willing to have it either way, peace or war. You have declared psychological war on me, and I'm no longer prepared to be passive about it. I'm going to pull out all the stops and go to war with you

now."

"Look, I want to get along," he reiterated.

"Fine," I said, and he and I became the best of friends and had no more trouble.

That is one way you can maintain discipline. It didn't hurt him. It probably helped him. It certainly helped me.

I discovered another very effective technique, which is translatable beyond school. One day I found a student engaging in an infraction of the rules. I said nothing about it until the next day. Then, in the middle of the class period, I interrupted what I was saying and remarked: "Yesterday, Frances, you violated this rule (and I specified). Your punishment is this." Without another word I returned to the discussion. Nobody said much, but I could hear people thinking about it. In a day or two I caught somebody else doing something, and didn't mention that for two days. The next time I let it go three days—then, a week—then, two weeks—and then, three. Thus, the culprit never knew whether he or she had been detected in crime, and the agony of the suspense cut down on the pleasure considerably. The students never knew whether they had been caught—or when the ax would fall. A lot of times teachers forget that they were once students themselves, and they don't put any ingenuity into the psychological warfare which some students take joy in waging and always win.

We had a rule in my class. If anybody brought anything in and left it there and I found it, that individual had to sit down and punch out a whole sheet of full Braille cells, using a dull stylus and an old slate that wasn't in good alignment. The work had to be done in my presence so that I knew the individual had done it. That was also the rule if a person didn't bring whatever was supposed to be brought to class—book, paper, or whatever.

Once when I was keeping library, the president of the senior class brought me a written book report. I got called away from the library desk. When I left at the end of the period, I forgot to take the report with me. The next day when he came to my English class, the student walked up to my desk and handed the report to me. He said not a word. He just stood there. He had obviously primed all of his fellow students. Everybody simply sat and waited.

"You've got me dead to rights," I said. "Furthermore, you have done something else. You have stripped away all of the things that might have muddied the water. You didn't come and demand that I do anything. You didn't make me a speech. You just brought the evidence and laid it out. Therefore, today in library I will bring the slate and stylus and come and sit at your table. In your presence I will punch each and every dot and present you with the completed page."

I would like to be able to tell you that I deliberately planned that piece of drama—that I knowingly planted the book report and calculatedly forgot it in the hope that he would do what he did. But I didn't. I wasn't sharp enough. However, I hope I learned enough from the experience that I would do it next time—assuming, of course, there ever is a next time. It worked wonders. It made the students feel that I was willing to be flexible, that I wasn't stuffy, that I took seriously the rules which I made, and that I was not above

the law. It did a lot of positive things, and if I had had the wisdom to think, I would certainly have staged it, just the way it happened. But I didn't. I simply saw the possibilities in the situation and took advantage of them. Somebody has wisely said that luck is where opportunity and preparation meet.

I'm only saying to you that if you begin by assuming you can't do whatever it is, or that you've got to have this or that special opportunity or career—if you're going to be a crybaby or a grouch or tell people how bad it is that you're blind, then you'll get a lot of sympathy but relatively few jobs and still fewer promotions. You will live as miserable a life as you believe you will live—and all needlessly, except that society has taught you to feel that way, and you haven't been able to break out of the stereotype. Many of us who are blind could get jobs that we don't get, and we don't simply because we have been told by society that we can't perform, and we have believed it. We have fallen into all of the traps of the stereotype: We have been told that we're geniuses for doing the simplest of routine tasks, and we have taken pride in the so-called "compliment." Too often we have sold our potential equality for a trifle: If, for instance, it is raining and luggage is to be loaded into a car, which is right in front of a door and easily accessible, almost nobody would think anything of it if a perfectly healthy blind person waited under shelter while a sighted person said, "Just stand here. I'll load the car." It isn't pleasant to get wet, especially if you have on freshly pressed clothes. I know. I've been there. And there is a temptation, if nobody expects you to do whatever it is, to take advantage of it.

There is also something else: You can become so obnoxiously independent that you are intolerable. If a sighted person is sitting at one end of a table and wants the salt which is at the other end, he or she doesn't insist on getting up and going to get it to prove the ability to walk. The normal sighted person will allow someone near the salt to pass it. But I know blind people who insist that "Nobody's going to touch my arm! Nobody's going to help me! I'm independent." They are so unpleasant and so offensive that people turn away in disgust—or, even worse, pity.

It is a matter of having sense enough to know how to behave to get on in the world. If your motive in standing in that doorway is that since only one person is needed to load the car and that there is no point in everybody getting wet, that's fine. But if your motive is to stand and wait because you're blind, don't complain the next time you don't get equal treatment when the goodies are being passed out. You have behaved as if you can't compete on terms of equality. Now, accept it.

I believe that we as blind people are capable of competing on terms of real equality with others in jobs. I believe that the reason we have not done so in the past is that society has custodialized us and held us down. But I believe also that this has not happened because society has wanted to be vicious or unkind or mean. It is because people have taken for granted that that's the way blind people are, that blind persons can't be expected to do this or that kind of thing.

Furthermore, I believe that since we are part of society, we have accepted

the public views about us and have done a great deal to reinforce those views. I believe we must begin to change that. I believe we are beginning to change it, and that's what Job Opportunities for the Blind (JOB) is about.

More and more we have the opportunity for our future to be in our own hands if we will only take advantage of that opportunity and make it so. Not all sighted people have good will toward us, but most do—and most want to be of assistance, once they really know that we can compete on terms of equality and that we want to. But before we can convince anybody else, we must convince ourselves. We must really believe that we are capable of equality—that we can get along as well as others similarly situated in society. Unless we believe that, how can we expect other people to believe it? To a great extent, the sighted public will treat us like what we believe in our heart of hearts we are.